

U.S. Patent Application For

PORTABLE COMPUTER HAVING REMOVABLE
COMPONENT COVER

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PORTABLE COMPUTER HAVING REMOVABLE COMPONENT COVER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention generally relates to portable computers, and particularly to a portable computer having a readily removable cover to permit access to components, such as modem modules.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 In a variety of computers, particularly laptop and notebook computers, the size and aesthetics of the overall package are particularly important. Generally, numerous components must be packed into a relatively small space
15 provided by the computer housing. This, of course, can lead to a greater level of difficulty in obtaining access to various internal components.

20 For example, in certain notebook computers, a variety of components are located under the palm rest area below the keyboard. Access to the components requires that the user disassemble the unit to remove the top deck or a portion of the top deck before gaining access to the

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desired components. It would be desirable to simplify this procedure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention features a technique for providing access to a variety of components, e.g. modem/network cards, real time clock batteries and BIOS firmware hubs, often found in portable computers. The technique utilizes a portable computer housing having a top
10 deck with an opening disposed over one or more selected components. A motherboard is disposed within the portable computer housing beneath the top deck. This permits the one or more selected components to be readily coupled with the motherboard. A component cover is mounted over the
15 opening and is configured to provide tool-less actuation. Thus, a user can simply grasp the component cover, move the component cover to an open position and gain access to the one or more selected components.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

20 The invention will hereafter be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals denote like elements, and:

Figure 1 is a front perspective view of an exemplary portable computer, such as a notebook computer, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

5

Figure 2 is a view similar to Figure 1 but showing a raised display screen;

Figure 3 is an enlarged perspective view of the component cover mounted in a closed position to the top deck of the portable computer;

10

Figure 4 is a view similar to Figure 3 with the component cover removed;

15

Figure 5 is a front perspective view of the top of the component cover; and

Figure 6 is a side view of the component cover.

20

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

Referring generally to Figure 1, an exemplary electronic device 10 is illustrated. In this embodiment, electronic device 10 is a portable computer and in particular, a notebook computer. Such portable computing devices are examples of devices that incorporate and benefit from features of the present invention, but the illustrated device is used as an example only and should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention to these specific electronic devices. Hereinafter, electronic device 10 is referred to as portable computer 10 to facilitate explanation of the present invention.

Portable computer 10 comprises a base housing 12 coupled to a display 14. Display 14 may be moved between a closed position, as illustrated best in Figure 1, and an open position, as illustrated best in Figure 2. In the example illustrated, display 14 is coupled to base housing 12 by a hinge 16 that permits display 14 to be pivoted between the open and closed positions.

Base housing 12 typically has a bottom wall 18, a top deck 20 and a plurality of side walls 22 that extend between bottom wall 18 and top deck 20. Base housing 12 encloses a motherboard 24 disposed between bottom wall 18 and top deck 20. As is known to those of ordinary skill in the art, a variety of components, including one or more microprocessors, memory modules, drivers, etc. may be coupled to motherboard 24. Additionally, base housing 12 may be designed to provide openings for a variety of ports 26 and drives 28. The actual type and number of ports, drives and other features will vary with the design objectives of a given device.

As illustrated best in Figure 2, portable computer 10 also includes one or more user interfaces, such as a mouse pad 30 having a plurality of control buttons 32. Another exemplary interface may include a keyboard 34 having a plurality of input keys 36. Portable computer 10 also may include a variety of other features, such as speakers 38 to provide audio output.

Display 14 may comprise a variety of displays designed to provide graphical information to a user. An exemplary

display 14 is a flat screen display having a screen 40 on which graphical information is viewed.

As further illustrated in Figure 3, portable computer 10 comprises a component cover 42 attached to top deck 20 on the user side of keyboard 34. Component cover 42 is designed to permit a user to rest his or her hand on a top surface 44 of component cover 42. Component cover 42 also allows tool-less access to components positioned beneath by simply moving the component cover to an open position. In the illustrated embodiment, the open position is one in which the component cover 42 is completely removed from top deck 20.

Top surface 44 extends to a beveled or slightly arcuate surface 46 and a pair of side surfaces 48. Surface 46 is disposed generally between keyboard 34 and top surface 44. Typically, surfaces 44, 46 and 48 are part of a unitary cover 42 that may be formed, for example, by injection molding a suitable plastic material.

As illustrated in Figure 4, component cover 42 is designed to cover an opening 50 disposed through top deck

20 and defined by a perimeter edge 52. Opening 50 is
designed to provide easy access to a variety of components
that may require servicing, interchangeability,
substitution of upgraded components, etc. Exemplary
5 components include a modem or network card 54, such as a
modem/NIC module, a real time clock battery 56 and a BIOS
firmware hub 58. In the illustrated embodiment, all of
these components are arranged under cover 42 to allow
access through opening 50. Additionally, a variety of
10 other components also may be located below opening 50 to
provide easy access for a user.

Component cover 42 and opening 50 are particularly
amenable for items such as card 54 that may commonly be
15 changed, added or upgraded. Opening 50 allows a user to
simply unplug card 54 from a corresponding plug connector
56 used to couple card 54 to motherboard 24. The actual
design of card 54, plug connector 56 and optional card
mounting systems may vary substantially from one computer
20 to another.

Various features facilitate easy attachment and
removal of component cover 42 by a user without the

requirement of tools. As illustrated in Figure 4, top deck 20 has a recessed region 60 disposed about the perimeter edge 52 that defines opening 50. Along this recessed region 60, a plurality of attachment features are designed to hold component cover 42 in place over opening 50 while permitting easy removal. For example, at least one and typically a pair of tab receptacles 62 are disposed in top deck 20 along the user side of recessed region 60. Tab receptacles 62 are designed to receive corresponding tabs 64 of component cover 42, as best illustrated in Figures 5 and 6.

Additionally, a latch or catch opening 66 is disposed through recessed region 60 of top deck 20 on a side of opening 50 generally opposite tab receptacles 62. Catch opening 66 is designed to receive a flexible catch 68, as best illustrated in Figure 6. Flexible catch 68 includes a hook portion 70 sized for insertion through catch opening 66. An upper surface 72 of hook portion 70 engages a bottom surface 74 of top deck 20 when component cover 42 is attached to top deck 20 over opening 50. Release of flexible catch 68 simply requires that a user apply pressure to surface 46 until hook portion 70 is released

from bottom surface 74 for removal through catch opening
66.

5 A variety of other features also may be incorporated
into either or both top deck 20 or component cover 42 to
further hold or stabilize component cover 42 over opening
50. For example, component cover 42 may comprise one or
more stabilizer tabs 76, as best illustrated in Figure 6.
The one or more stabilizer tabs 76 are positioned for
10 receipt in one or more corresponding receptacles 78
disposed in top deck 20.

It should be noted that the number, design and
location of the retention features can be adjusted
15 according to various design parameters and application
requirements. However, such features cooperate to allow
tool-less, quick-release of component cover 42 from housing
12. This provides easy access to internal components, such
as card 54, real time clock battery 56 and BIOS firmware
20 hub 58.

It will be understood that the foregoing description
is of preferred embodiments of this invention, and that the

invention is not limited to the specific forms shown. For example, although the component cover is illustrated as used on a notebook computer, the cover also can be used on a variety of other portable computers and electronic
5 devices; the shape and size of the component cover can be adjusted; the number and configuration of retention features may be adjusted; and the desired components disposed beneath the component cover can vary depending on design parameters. These and other modifications may be
10 made in the design and arrangement of the elements without departing from the scope of the invention as expressed in the appended claims.